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Key to Symbols



× bolt

p fixed piton

OW off width

LB layback

SB sling belay, i.e.
hanging belay

① belay at the top of
the first pitch

○
opt optional belay

○ start of the climb,
if not obvious

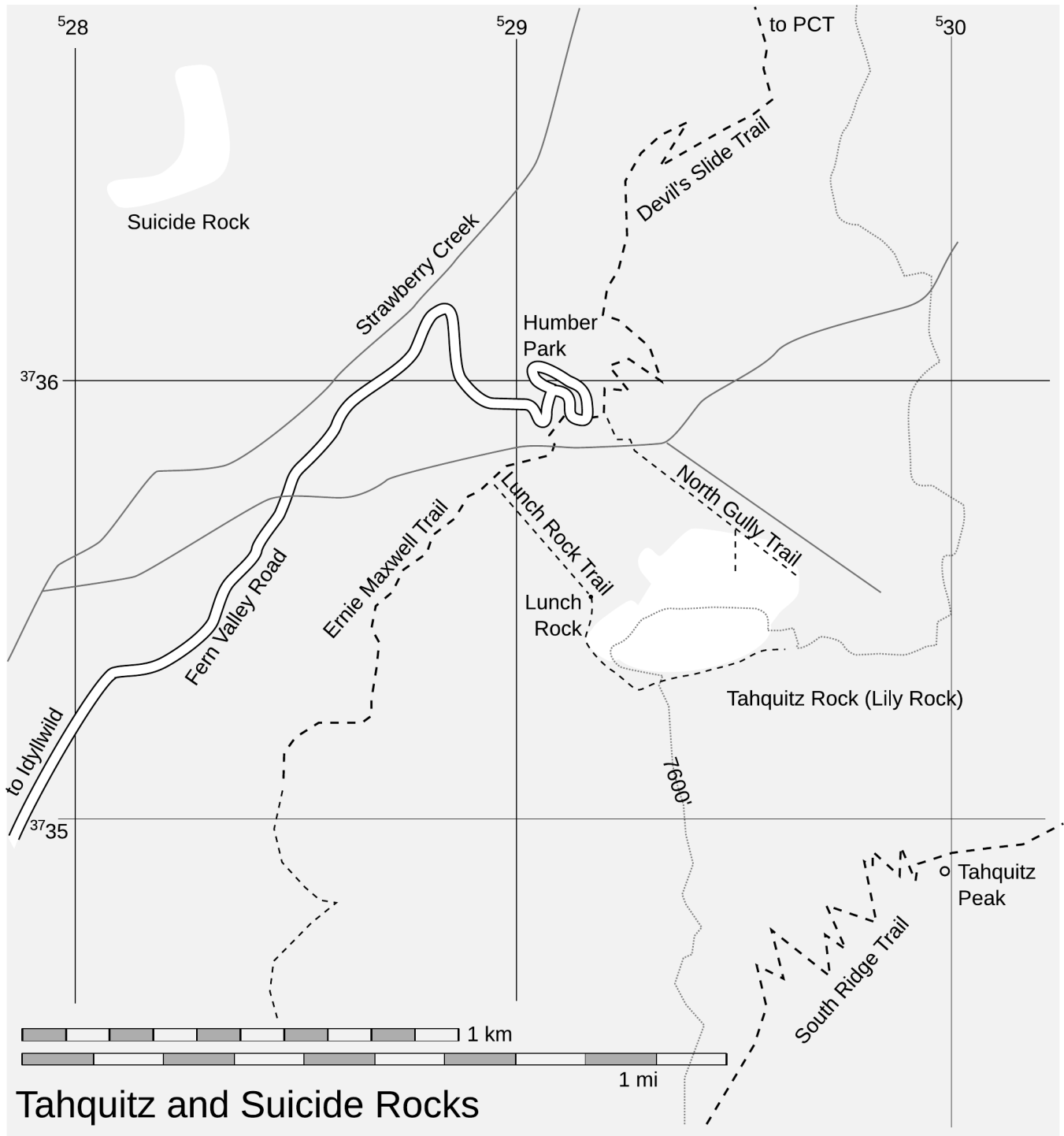


trough



arete

Map of Fern Valley, Tahquitz and Suicide Rocks



Weather and Climbing Season

Climbing season is usually from the end of March to around Thanksgiving. Often in early spring there will be snow piled up at the bases of climbs, but the rock itself will be snow-free. For most of the summer, the forecast is for a 20% chance of showers. Waiting for the number to go to 0% could mean not climbing all summer.

If checking the weather forecast for Idyllwild, keep in mind that the town is at 5400', while the summit of Tahquitz Rock is at 7973'. As a rule of thumb, temperatures on north-facing routes will feel colder by 20 degrees F than the forecast in Idyllwild. A forecast for the same elevation and area, including wind chill, is available at www.mountain-forecast.com/peaks/Jean-Peak/forecasts/2500.

Ratings

Historical

The Yosemite Decimal System originated at Tahquitz, and the following climbs were used as the standards to define the scale. For each climb, I've also listed the consensus rating from Mountainproject (in 2015), which shows that there has been quite a bit of inflation in the ratings over the years, mainly at the low end of the scale — nobody wants to say they climb 5.0 these days.

Historical definition of the YDS, and inflation of ratings

5.0	The Trough	FA 1936	modern 5.4
5.1	Fingertip Traverse	FA 1936	modern 5.4
5.2	Frightful Variation of the Trough	FA 1944	modern 5.2
5.3	East Lark	FA 1950	modern 5.5
5.4	Angel's Fright	FA 1936	modern 5.6
5.5	Ski Tracks	FA 1947, 1957	modern 5.6, 5.9
5.6	Sahara Terror	FA 1942	modern 5.7
5.7	Fingertrip	FA 1946	modern 5.7
5.8	Mechanic's Route	FA 1937	modern 5.8R
5.9	Open Book	FFA 1952	modern 5.9

Evaluating ratings from a guidebook

When depending on a guidebook for information about the difficulty of a climb, take into account both the popularity of the climb and the date of its first ascent. Old and lesser-known climbs often retain their historical ratings, which can be extremely sandbagged by modern standards.

For example, Summit magazine did a big spread on Tahquitz in 1960, which you can find scans of online. They describe Northeast Farce as 5.3 and White Maiden's Walkway as 5.1. Having done these two climbs, I would agree that Northeast Farce is a couple of grades harder than the Maiden. But the 2001 edition of the Vogel-Gaines guidebook rates these climbs as 5.3 and 5.4, respectively — as if the Maiden were the *harder* climb. What has probably happened is that because the Maiden is one of the most popular climbs on the rock, there has been pressure to inflate its rating. Since almost nobody does Northeast Farce, it retains the rating that was assigned when it was first climbed in 1954.

Another good example of this phenomenon is two obscure climbs on the inaccessible south face of Suicide Rock, named Minor and Spring Cleaning. The first ascent of Minor is lost in the mists of time, while Spring Cleaning had its FA in 1970. Several people who I've done these climbs with agree that they are equal in difficulty, but Vogel and Gaines list them as 5.1 and 5.6.

Descent routes

Friction descent

This is the class 3 standard descent for routes that end on the low western shoulder of the rock. Most of these routes end below the friction descent, but some, such as White Maiden's Walkaway, end above it.

Locate the house-sized boulder near the top of Tahquitz Rock's western shoulder, perched above the south side of the rock. Pass around the boulder on either the uphill or the downhill side, and go to the east side of the boulder. Insert into a chimney leading down the south face of the rock, and then continue down a chute/chimney that leads diagonally down and west. Head east toward a brushy island with two tall pine trees, one dead and one alive. Continue to a smaller vee-shaped tree. Continue traversing across slabs until you reach the dirt.

Return to Lunch Rock on a use trail. This trail can become indistinct in spots, and it is easy to be tempted into false alternatives that lead into dense brush. The correct trail runs parallel to and just a few feet left of the edge of the exposed granite. In most places the edge of the granite means the base of the rock wall, but in two spots it means the edge of some low-angle slabs. Stay off of these slabs, one set of which lies below the friction descent and another near the bottom of the Ski Tracks.

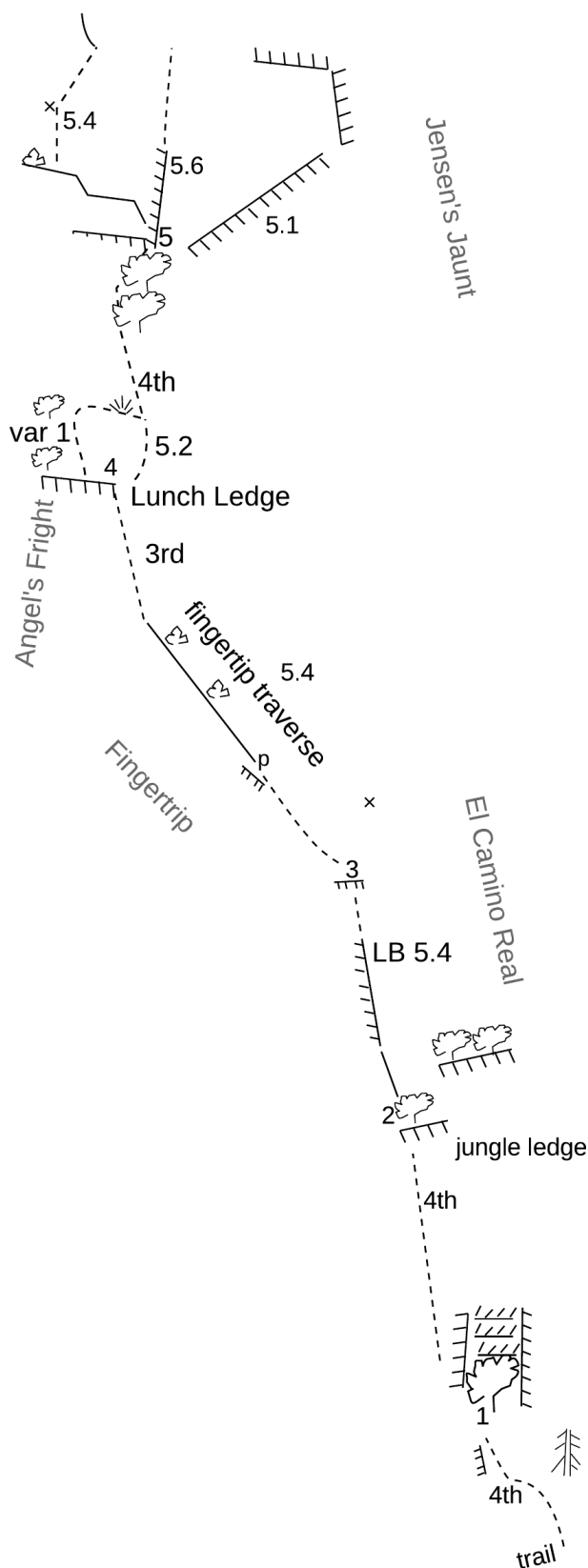
After passing the second set of slabs, continue around the corner and back to Lunch Rock.

North gully descent

This descent route is used by climbs that end near the top of the rock or to its east. If coming down from the summit, scramble down class 3 rock to the saddle lying between the summit of Tahquitz Rock and Tahquitz Peak. However, most of the climbing routes that use this descent end below and to the east of the summit, and for these routes the traverse to the saddle is no more than class 2.

Having reached the saddle, turn left down a steep, rough trail, then continue down slabs on the right. Class 2. Get back on the use trail, which gradually becomes more obvious and well maintained. Continue to the upper parking lot at Humber Park.

Fingertip Traverse (5.4)



An easy Tahquitz classic, this was the original climb used to define 5.1 on the Yosemite Decimal Scale. Much of the climbing is 4th or easy 5th class, but the namesake traverse is more like 5.4 by modern standards, as are the P3 layback and P6 slab. Hike up to Lunch Rock and then head to the right along the trail. The first pitch starts directly from the trail, near a truncated tree, with the first belay easily visible. It will be convenient to have plenty of small cams. Pro to 2". FA 1936, Jim Smith, Bob Brinton, Arthur Johnson, and William Rice.

P1. Scramble up to a large double oak tree in an alcove, the infamous "ant tree." Anchor at the lower part of the tree to avoid stirring up the ants. 30 m, 4th class.

P2. Move up the left side of the alcove's left wall, where it is shortest, stemming against the opposite wall and then against two branches of the upper tree. Avoid the main trunk to keep from stirring up the ants. The committing move onto the rock can be protected by slinging branches and also with a 0.3" cam (blue Metolius) in a small finger crack. Continue up easy terrain. 30 m, 4th and easy 5th class except for the move out of the tree.

Var 1: Instead of using the tree, climb the hand crack in the broken overhang at the back of the alcove. Protect by reaching up to place a 2" cam. (I haven't tried this or seen anyone do it.)

P3. Climb a right-facing dihedral with good protection and stances. Near the top of the dihedral, a 10-foot section requires laybacking (5.4). Pro now becomes scarce, but there is a good placement for a 0.75" cam (green C4) immediately on exiting the layback. Belay at a tiny ledge on a slab (nuts). 30 m

P4. Go around a corner to the left. One of a pair of old fixed pins broke off in 2018, so the other is probably ready to go as well. Traverse along a finger-width crack, smearing on the sloping face below, 5.4. Protect using the trees and active pro 1-2" and smaller. Continue up 3rd-class terrain to Lunch Ledge (gear belay). Here the route joins up with Angel's Fright and Fingertip. 40 m

P5. Climb up around a corner to the right and head up (5.2). Continue up fourth-class terrain.

Var 1: Climb up from the middle of the ledge, surmounting all the steps before traversing right. This variation creates problems with rope drag, especially if linking pitches 5 and 6. Avoiding rope drag may require back-cleaning or not placing protection. 4th class

P6. Move up and left on a flake and then tiptoe along it as it continues around a corner. This is easily protected with 0.3"-0.5" cams. (Do not follow the ramp lower down.) A few feet before a small tree, head 10' up a 5.4 slab to an orange bolt. (The slab is steeper directly above the tree.) Beyond the bolt, the slab gets less steep and there is pro.

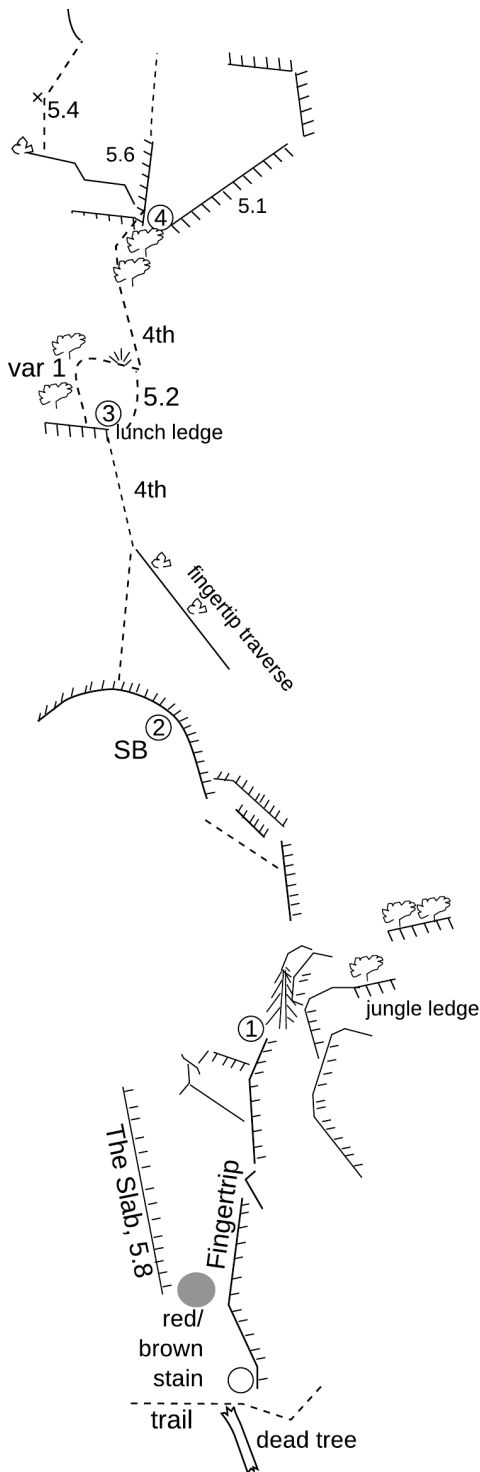
Var 1: Head right into a 5.1 gully, then turn left at an overhang.

Var 2: Climb a very thin finger crack, punctuated with pin scars. 5.6

Walk uphill to the friction descent route (p. 5).

Ben Crowell, github.com/bcrowell/tahquitz

Fingertrip (5.7)



A Tahquitz classic, this climb was the original standard for 5.7 on the Yosemite Decimal Scale. Two and a half pitches of sustained 5.7 are followed by two and a half pitches of easier climbing. The more difficult pitches offer sufficient protection, and any fall is likely to be a clean fall. Pro to 2". FA Chuck Wilts, Don Gillespie, and Jerry Rosenblatt, 1946.

Hike up to Lunch Rock and then head to the right along the trail. Just before a steep uphill section of the trail, you will see a large dead tree, lying toe-up on the right, with its bark stripped off. (The tree died in 2015/2016. Guidebooks describe the live tree as a landmark.) This is the start of the climb. A red stain on the rock is another landmark. Don't confuse the start of this climb with the much more difficult overhanging layback to the left of the red stain, which is The Slab 5.8.

P1. Layback and stem up a left-facing dihedral. Near the top, it becomes easier to head off to the left along a 0.75" crack, then traverse back to the right on a ledge. 5.7, 55 m.

P2. Head up from the belay, then traverse left on a face and step around a corner into the arch. Undercling the arch (this being the source of the climb's name). Hanging belay. 5.7, ~ 45 m.

P3. Escape through the weak point in the overhang at the apex of the arch, 5.7. Continue to a large, low-lying tree at the top of Fingertip Traverse's namesake feature, and then up 4th class climbing to Lunch Ledge.

P4. Climb up around a corner to the right and head up (5.2). Continue up fourth-class terrain.

Var 1: Climb up from the middle of the ledge, surmounting all the steps before traversing right. This variation creates problems with rope drag, especially if linking pitches 4 and 5. Avoiding rope drag may require back-cleaning or not placing protection. 4th class

P5. Move up and left on a flake and then tiptoe along it as it continues around a corner. This is easily protected with 0.3"-0.5" cams. (Do not follow the ramp lower down.) A few feet before a small tree, head 10' up a 5.4 slab to an orange bolt. (The slab is steeper directly above the tree.) Beyond the bolt, the slab gets less steep and there is pro.

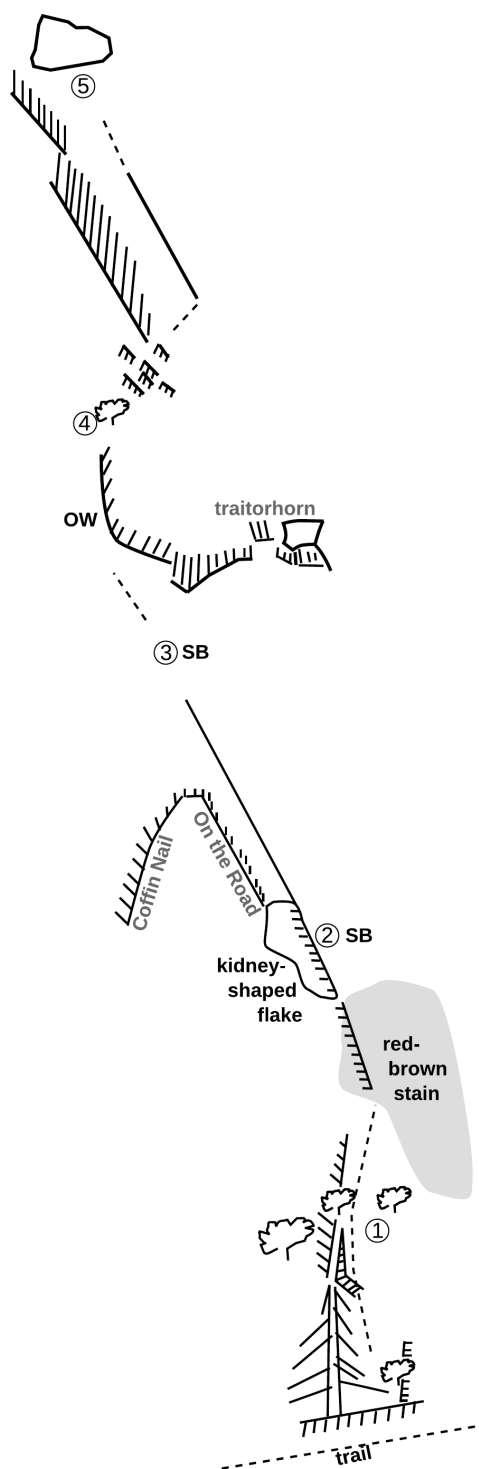
Var 1: Head right into a 5.1 gully, then turn left at an overhang.

Var 2: Climb a very thin finger crack, punctuated with pin scars. 5.6

Walk uphill to the friction descent route (p. 5).

Ben Crowell, github.com/bcrowell/tahquitz

Jensen's Jaunt (5.6)



Warning: I've only done this climb twice, so some of this may be inaccurate. The first belay is shown in what I think the location Gaines gives, but I think we belayed farther to the right, which may have been a more difficult route.

Sustained climbing at the grade. This is an old-school 5.6, and in many climbing areas it would probably be rated more like 5.8. The bottom pitches are shared with Jensen's Jaunt, the final ones with Coffin Nail and On the Road. Pro to 4". FA Carl Jensen, Jim Smith, and Don McDonald, 1938. Wilts says that the route was first climbed because someone fell off of the Traitorhorn route and decided to go around rather than trying to get up Traitorhorn again.

From Lunch Rock, head around to the foot of the southwest end of the rock. The start of the climb lies in the general area to the right of Fingertip Traverse and to the left of the gigantic right-facing dihedral of Open Book. More nearby are two short right-facing walls (not shown on the topo) at about the same height as the first belay. One of these walls is to the left (first belay of Coffin Nail) and one to the right (start of Turbo Flange, at the bottom of the red-brown stain). From the trail, it is easy to identify the red-brown stain, the kidney-shaped flake, and the imposing overhangs of Traitorhorn, the latter seeming more prominent and higher up than they actually are. Scramble up to a start at a wooded ledge just above the trail.

P1. Climb easy terrain to a belay near several trees. 5.0, 20 m

P2. Head up with the goal of getting on top of the right-facing dihedral formed by the top edge of the kidney-shaped flake. Hanging belay at a cramped alcove. P2 and P3 can be linked up if desired.

P3. Climb a jam crack that leads up and left. The first moves out of the alcove are strenuous. Some 5.6 climbing is followed by an easier stretch, then harder climbing again. Continue to the lower left corner of the Traitorhorn overhangs. Hanging belay on a spacious slope.

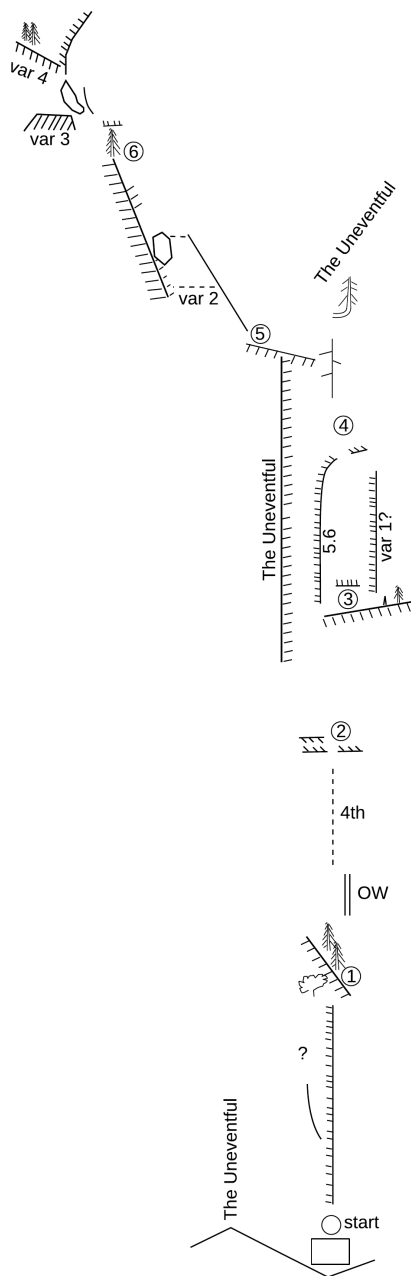
P4. Move up and around to the left, to an attention-getting step-around move, which is made easier by taking a step down. The move can be protected with small gear. After the step-around, follow an off-width crack. There is another 10 feet of difficult climbing, 5.6. Large cams, including a 4" cam, will be helpful. Continue through easier climbing to a big, comfy, shady belay ledge at a mountain mahogany.

P5. This pitch involves escaping and surmounting the big left-facing dihedral by going around to the right. Climb class 4 blocks, then traverse 5.6 slab to a low-angle hand-and-fist crack. (It's possible that there is an easier way to do this, since Gaines implies that the whole pitch is 5.2.) Climb the 5.2 crack (or walk up the slab). 55 m.

Var 1: Climb the dihedral. I haven't tried this variation. Gaines calls it 5.7. Climb class 3 slabs to the friction descent.

Ben Crowell, github.com/bcrowell/tahquitz

North Buttress (5.5)



Warning: I've only done pitches 1-5 once. Because the climb goes up a ridge, it's somewhat nondescript, and it's likely that there are easier ways to do many of these pitches than the ways we found.

This route crosses The Uneventful near the top, and many climbers do the lower pitches of The Uneventful but then finish using the final pitches of North Buttress, which are easier. Most of the climbing is about 5.3, but there are a few harder moves mixed in. Gear to 3". Two #1 and one #2 micro nuts. FA R. Smith and Don Wilson, 1952.

Approach: The North Buttress lies in between the Maiden Buttress and the Northeast Buttress. Immediately to the left are the Larks, and a clear visual landmark from the trail is the huge gendarme that lies at the top of the Larks. A gully, the start of The Uneventful, splits the buttress at the bottom into two sub-buttresses. The climb starts at the base of the right-hand one. To reach the first belay in one rope length, it's necessary to start on top of a boulder.

P1. Climb a right-facing dihedral to a long, sloping ledge/gully with several trees in it. At a crux, the only protection I was able to devise was by equalizing several #1 and #2 micro nuts. Below this point, a crack branches off to the left and offers easier climbing, but I don't know whether it continues to go at the grade all the way to the belay. 60 m to the lower pine tree. 5.5 except for the crux.

P2. An off-width crack coming up from the belay was a little awkward and strenuous, and it's likely that the climbing to the left of it would be easier. Higher up, this pitch becomes 4th class. 60 m from the lower pine tree.

P3. Continue to a big ledge with a small pine tree and a stump festooned with slings.

P4. Climb the left of the two dihedrals. Beware of some flakes that may be loose. Exit the overhang through a notch. 5.6, 30 m.

Var 1: Vogel and Gaines seem to suggest climbing the right-hand dihedral, aiming for a second notch. I haven't tried this variation. A blank section near the bottom looked like it might not offer protection or might not go at the grade.

P5. Move the belay to the left end of the ledge.

P6. Climb up and left through blocky terrain along the obvious weakness, the lower of two diagonal cracks. Traverse left at the obvious opportune point, to a little saddle. Downclimb slightly to insert into the dihedral; or, for more spice, head up a thin fingertip traverse (5.6), which can be protected with a small cam. Climb to a pine tree nestled in an alcove containing a cave. 5.5, 60 m

Var 2: Climb higher than the "J" tree, place protection, and then come back down and traverse the slab at about the same height as the "J" tree, where black knobs are available for hands and feet. A no-hands crux cannot be protected adequately, especially for the follower, without preparing by placing the pro higher up. 5.7

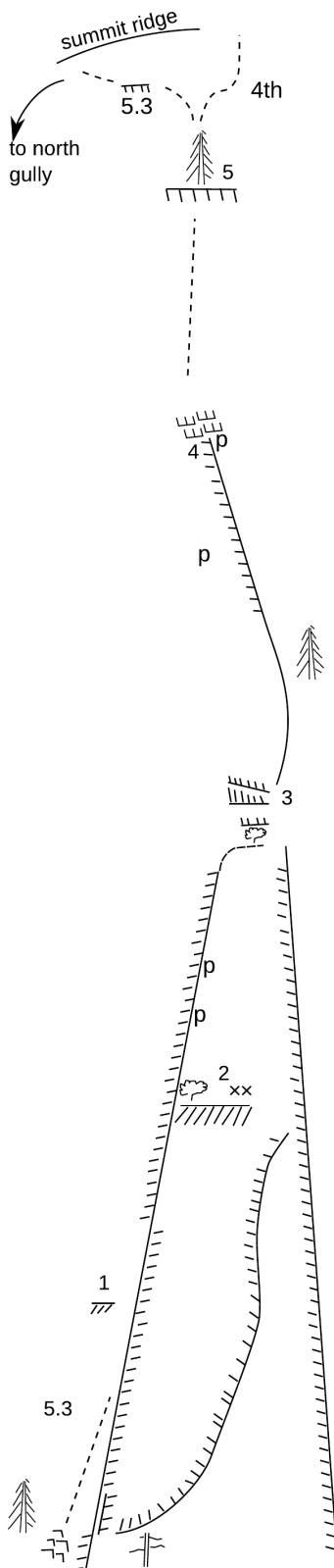
P7. Escape the alcove by climbing up and left, then continue upward through a difficult gap/chimney formed by a flake (5.6). Continue up a right-facing dihedral, then over a short wall to the top of the rock. 5.5 m.

Var 3: Before the chimney, head left to a black and white mottled slab, with underclings and protection available along its rim. Downclimb into the right-hand exit chute of the Larks. 5.7.

Var 4: After the chimney, traverse left along a ledge toward a pair of trees. Continue traversing until you emerge onto the top of the rock. 4th class after the chimney.

Ben Crowell, github.com/bcrowell/tahquitz

Northeast Face, East Variation (5.6)



This is a fun route that is easily protected and can be climbed on a Saturday morning without being in a conga line. A possible negative is that there is a certain sameness to a lot of the climbing on pitches 2-4.

This climb is in the middle of the northeast face, to the left of the Larks and to the right of El Grandote. A prominent inverted “Y” is formed by right-facing dihedrals, and this variation heads up its left fork. Approach via the North Side Trail. The “Y” is difficult to see through the trees from the trail, but the north face lies below the prominent gendarme at the top of the Larks, and this climb is on the left side of that face. Sustained 5.5-5.6 climbing on pitches 2 through 5. Pro to 3”, with a 4” cam repeatedly coming in handy. FA Don Wilson and Royal Robbins, 1954.

P1. Climb flakes to the left of the dihedral, enter the left-facing part of the dihedral briefly, and belay at a small ledge. Ignore the bolts to the right, which are for the slab climb Grace Slick. 60 m, 5.3.

P2. Continue up the crack. Insert into the main right-facing part of the dihedral and climb a wide (knee jam) crack. End at a bolted anchor on a huge ledge. 5.5

P3. Continue up the dihedral, toeing in to a thin crack at the corner, to a series of overlaps at the crotch of the “Y.” Traverse past a small tree, then move up through 5.6 broken terrain to a belay. The crux of the climb is at the end of this pitch and the beginning of the next one. Vogel and Gaines describe a variation that swings around farther to the right, but I’ve heard it’s harder. Higher up is an alternative belay at a tree around a corner to the right, but this is a poor choice due to rope drag.

P4. Head up the stem of the “Y” toward overhangs. Stay in the dihedral, and don’t be lured off route by the fixed piton above and to the left. Belay as close as possible to the overhangs in order to complete the following pitch with a 60 meter rope. A fixed pin can be backed up with 3” or 4” cams.

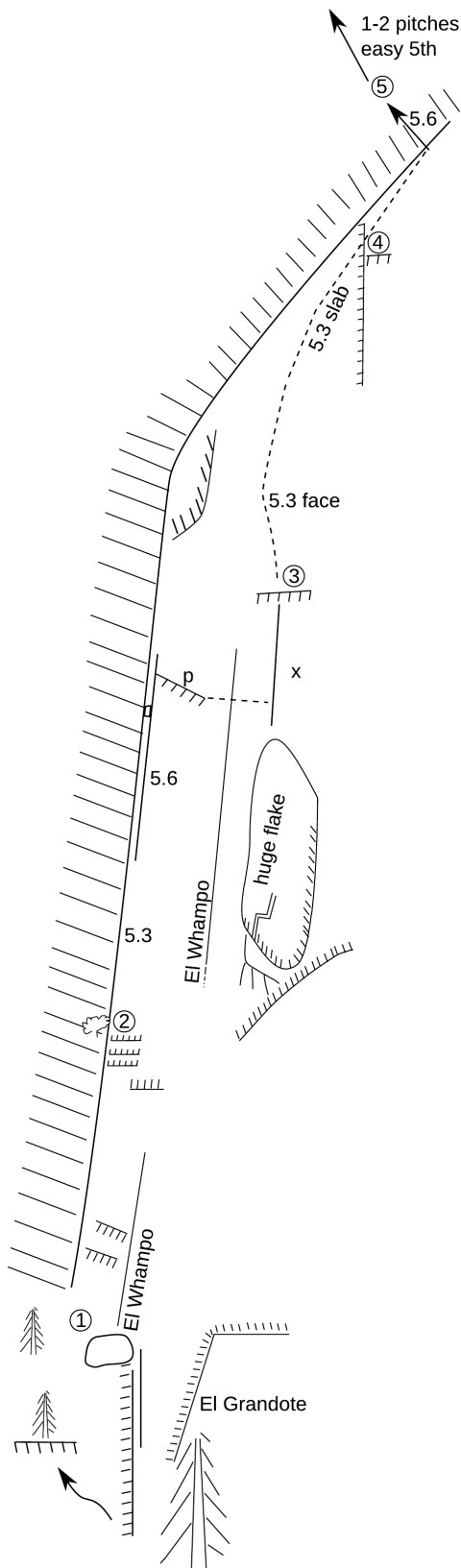
P5. Pull through gaps in a set of steep blocks and irregular overhangs. The moves are strenuous but easily protected, with big holds. After this the climbing gets much easier for the rest of the route. Head for a shady belay at a pine tree on a big ledge. 60 m

P6. Continue to the right up 4th class terrain to the summit ridge, or traverse a delicate 5.3 ledge to the left for more direct insertion into the north gully.

Ben Crowell, github.com/bcrowell/tahquitz

Northeast Farce (5.6 PG13)

Warning: I haven't done P2.



It would fun if this climb was a safe, mellow 5.3, a no-stress vertical hike, as suggested by the name and the guidebook ratings. Unfortunately that isn't quite what it is, because P3 is more like 5.6 by modern standards, and it lacks appropriate pro. For a chill day on the rock, I would suggest substituting the El Whampo crack for P3 — the climbing is comparable in difficulty, and it has pro.

The route is located on the extreme left corner of the northeast face, at a gigantic right-facing dihedral that dominates this entire area of the rock. This dihedral can be distinguished from the Northeast Rib dihedral to its left because the Northeast Farce dihedral is bigger, has a 6-foot-diameter tree near its base, and has the distinctive El Grandote overhang to its right. FA Don Wilson and Jerry Gallwas, 1954. Gear to 3".

P1. Start up a small right-facing dihedral to the left of the El Grandote arch. Exit early to the left in order to get out from under a house-sized boulder looming above. Continue past two pine trees, to a ledge on top of the boulder. Class 4.

P2. Climb the humongous dihedral to a belay at a small forked deciduous tree with rap rings. The tree is pretty small and should be backed up with gear if it is to be used as a belay anchor.

P3. Continue up the dihedral. Higher up, the climbing becomes much more strenuous, 5.6, turning into more of an off-width crack with sloper holds. A chockstone festooned with old, UV-damaged slings seems unfortunately to be too deeply wedged and buried now to allow the slings to be replaced. Continue to the ledge, which is the first highly prominent one visible above the belay. A 3" or 4" cam can be placed before starting across the ledge. Half-way across the ledge is an old fixed pin. After the ledge fades out, continue a short distance across 5.5 slab to the El Whampo crack, then across a little more slab, 5.6, to the big crack that forms the continuation of Northeast Farce. Between the fixed pin and the El Whampo crack, no other protection is available, and if the old, rusty pin were to fail, the result would be a long 90-degree pendulum fall back into the dihedral.

P4. Head up toward the roof. The easier climbing and better pro are found by veering a little to the left and climbing 5.3 face, where big holds are available on a series of flakes. As you near the roof, turn right and begin traversing along a slab that is made more secure by the availability of underclings. A comfy belay is available at a little nook inside a dihedral (the top of El Dorado?).

P5. Continue traversing and look for a weak spot at which to exit up through the roof. 5.6.

Var 1: Exit up and left from the belay, 5.7. Continue either to the right on the layback that is part of El Whampo (5.7), or up a gully to the left for easier climbing. (I haven't tried the latter.)

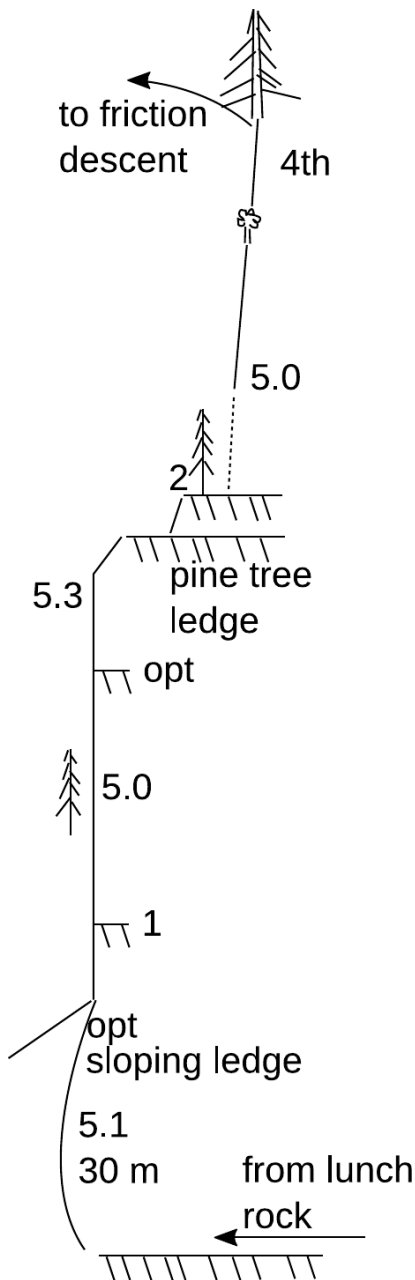
P6. Climb easy 5th class terrain to a big, comfy belay at a short, squat pine tree.

P7. Two exits present themselves, and either will work. On the left is a fourth-class gully that leads to a short, exposed easy 5th class section to get around a corner. The exit on the right consists of class 4 ledges.

Descend via the northeast gully.

Ben Crowell, github.com/bcrowell/tahquitz

The Trough (5.3)



This climb was originally used as a class 4 downclimb route off of Tahquitz. Later it served as the original definition of 5.0 on the Yosemite Decimal Scale, and with continuing grade inflation it has now come to be rated about 5.3. 3-5 pitches. Gear to 3", slings for trees. Singles of cams are enough. FA Jim Smith, Bob Brinton, and Z. Jasitas, 1936.

Approach: From the bottom end of the parking area at Humber Park, take the Ernie Maxwell trail and then turn left at the signpost for the climber's trail. Climb to Lunch Rock. Continue past Lunch Rock to the foot of Tahquitz Rock. Turn left, and crawl up through a tunnel behind a tree. Follow the ledge until it ends.

P1. Follow a crack up and around a corner to the left. Fingers and friction initially, then off-width. Pass through a large, sloping, triangular ledge and insert into the obvious trough. Belay at a small ledge on the right. 45 m

P2. Continue up the trough. Near the top is more difficult climbing including smearing and squeezing through a narrow gap. At the top, the trough steepens and ends. Move up and over to the right here, onto Pine Tree Ledge. 45 m.

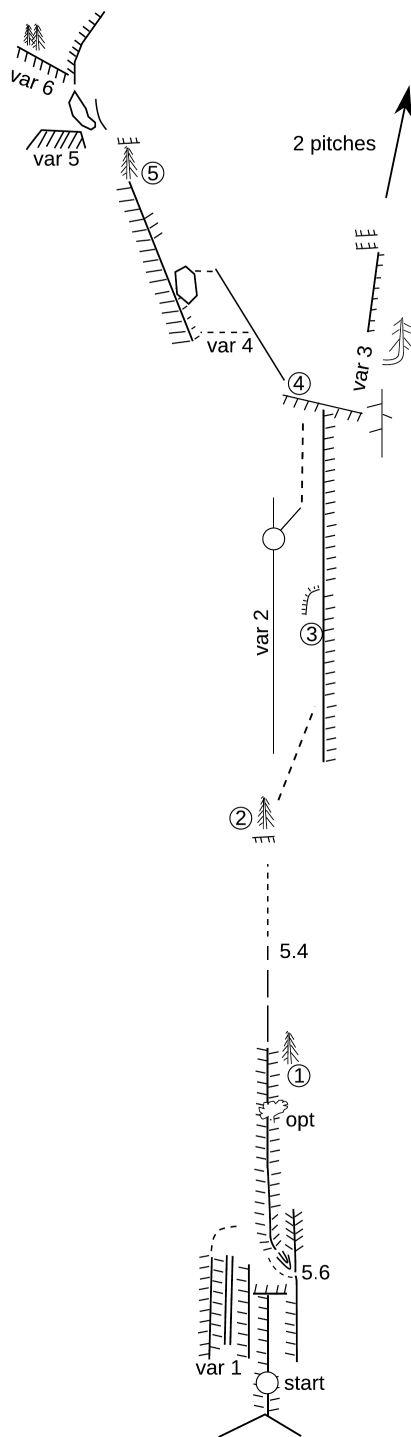
P3. Climb a face a couple of feet to the right of the pine tree, aiming for the small oak tree that is visible against the sky. It's difficult to find gear placements here that aren't cracks behind flakes, but it is possible to sling a series of tiny trees. The slope moderates and turns into a gully. Beyond the oak tree is a short section of easy climbing which ends at a huge pine tree. 55 meters, 5.0 and 4th.

From the pine tree, climb up class 2 slab to the left, staying on the crest of the ridge to avoid exposure and steeper slopes. About 60 meters from the pine tree, you reach an area of boulders and bushes (before the summit).

Hike uphill to the friction descent route (p. 5).

Ben Crowell, github.com/bcrowell/tahquitz

The Uneventful (5.6)



Warning: I haven't done the right-hand variation at the end.

Some of the belay ledges on this climb are littered with baseball- to cantaloupe-sized rocks. Avoid climbing this route below another party.

Six to seven pitches of climbing, most of it 5.4 to 5.6. Gear to 4". FA Harry Daley, Yvon Chouinard, C. Butler, and Dan Doody 1959.

Approach: The Uneventful lies on the North Buttress, which is the one in between the Maiden Buttress and the Northeast Buttress. Immediately to the left are the Larks, and a clear visual landmark from the trail is the huge gendarme that lies at the top of the Larks. A gully splits the North Buttress in two at the bottom, and the Uneventful starts in this gully, at a deep, shady alcove with azaleas growing in it. To complete P1 with a 60 m rope, it's necessary to scramble up some class 3 terrain to get higher in the gully.

P1. Above the start, the gully immediately splits into three forks. The middle fork is blocked by a steep headwall. Head up the right-hand fork, which curves around behind the headwall. A crux is formed by an overhang consisting of two tongue-shaped flakes. I couldn't tell whether the bottom tongue was firmly wedged under the top one or if it was attached to anything, so it seemed safer to detour left rather than powering through the overhang. Continue up the gully as the climbing gets a little easier, and finish at a comfy belay at a huge, truncated pine tree. 5.6, 60 m

Var 1: Detour left to a right-facing chimney underneath an arete. Climb the chimney, gain the crest of the arete, continue up to a small dead log, and then make a committing friction move to get back in the dihedral. 5.6

P2. The gully starts to dissipate, and the climbing gets easier. 5.4, 60 m

P3. Head diagonally toward a 10 foot tall, 80 meter long, left-facing dihedral. After inserting into the dihedral, continue to a decent semi-hanging belay. 5.6

Var 2: An obvious alternative line is a shallow crack paralleling the dihedral. As the crack becomes less defined, the climbing becomes more difficult and leads out onto the steep face above the Larks. A decent belay spot is available after about 40-50 m. (Anchor with a 2" cam.) From the belay, a crack and flake system provides an exit to the right. Beware of possibly loose flakes. 5.8

P4. Climb a cruxy overhanging arch where it meets the wall of the dihedral. To protect this move, an old fixed pin in the wall can be backed up with a small cam (black tricam) in the overhang itself. Continue up the dihedral to a big ledge near two big, distinctive trees: one dead and one shaped like a "J." 5.6, 35 m

P5. This is traditionally considered to be the end of the North Buttress route. Start from the left end of the ledge to avoid running out of rope. Climb up and left through blocky terrain along the obvious weakness, the lower of two diagonal cracks. Traverse left at the obvious opportune point, to a little saddle. Downclimb slightly to insert into the dihedral; or, for more spice, head up a thin fingertip traverse (5.6), which can be protected with a small cam. (Wilts and Vogel-Gaines describe a 5.7 traverse lower down, at the same height as the "J" tree. I attempted this and turned back at a poorly protected move that seemed much harder than 5.7.) Climb to a pine tree nestled in an alcove containing a cave. 5.5, 60 m

Var 3: This is the standard route as described by Wilts's 1974 guidebook: "Directly above the upper ["J"] tree is an interesting 5.5 chimney which leads to easier pitches and the top of the rock." I haven't done this version, so the topo just shows the terrain that was visible to me from belay 4. Two good beta photos on Mountainproject are titled "Jog right to skip the hard dihedral" and "Starting the J tree pitch that looks intimidating." There is some helpful discussion below one of the photos. 5.7?

Var 4: Climb higher than the "J" tree, place protection, and then come back down and traverse the slab at about the same height as the "J" tree, where black knobs are available for hands and feet. A no-hands crux cannot be protected adequately,

especially for the follower, without preparing by placing the pro higher up. 5.7

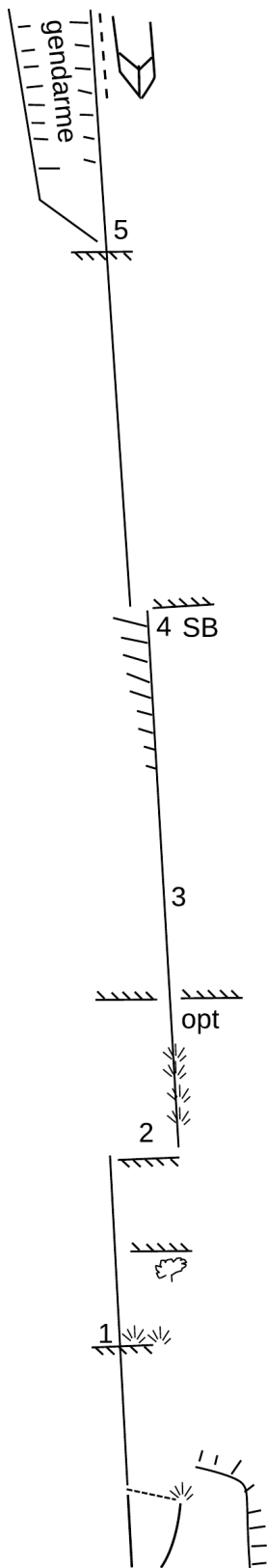
P6. Escape the alcove by climbing up and left, then continue upward through a difficult gap/chimney formed by a flake (5.6). Continue up a right-facing dihedral, then over a short wall to the top of the rock. 5.5 m.

Var 5: Before the chimney, head left to a black and white mottled slab, with underclings and protection available along its rim. Downclimb into the right-hand exit chute of the Larks. 5.7.

Var 6: After the chimney, traverse left along a ledge toward a pair of trees. Continue traversing until you emerge onto the top of the rock. 4th class after the chimney.

Ben Crowell, github.com/bcrowell/tahquitz

West Lark (5.4)



A low-angle ascent up two obvious cracks, with straightforward routefinding. The few harder moves are protectable. Pro to 2". Doubles of small cams are helpful on the later pitches. FA Roy Gorin, J. Hudson, William Dixon, and Ellen Wilts, 1954.

The first half of the climb is easily protected with nuts, but there is the constant hazard of falling and hitting a ledge. Pitches 4 and 5 have a lot of rounded, flaring cracks that don't take protection well, but there are no ledges, so a fall would be relatively inconsequential. Many of the belay ledges have baseball-sized loose rocks on them, so climbing underneath another party could be hazardous. The rock quality in general is fine, but not as stellar as some at Tahquitz, so don't trust holds without thinking.

This climb ends near the summit, so it's long, and climbing parties commonly take longer than expected to get up it and end up hiking out in the dark. The later pitches are just barely possible with a 60 m rope, and only if the belays are chosen as far up as possible.

The start lies at the extreme right side of the north face, just to the left of the north buttress. Approach via the North Side Trail, leaving the trail to approach the base of the climb by threading your way between talus piles. The gendarme near the top is the most visible landmark through the treetops.

To find the beginning of the climb, get up close and look for the obvious easy start in a recess, with the bush and short friction traverse shown in the topo. Nearby to the right is a left-facing dihedral ending in an overhang.

P1. Climb past an inconvenient bush and left a few feet across slab. (A direct start, to the left, is probably also possible, but I haven't tried it.) Insert into a crack and head up. Don't climb the dihedral to the right. Protect against falls onto the numerous ledges. ~ 35 m

P2. Continue up similar climbing in the same crack, ending at a ledge on the right. ~ 30 m

P3. Traverse to the right side of the ledge and begin climbing a different crack, which has a lot of vegetation in it. Continue up through a gap in an overhang and belay above it. I think there are two ledges at which you can belay, and the higher one may be preferable because it gives you more options for placing belay 4 higher up. ~ 30 m

P4. Continue up 5.0 climbing with less abundant protection. A right-facing wall develops to the left. As you near an overhang, the climbing gets harder. Continue to a hanging belay. The belay needs to be as close as possible to the overhang if P5 is to be possible with a 60-meter rope, but good placements for a gear anchor are not plentiful. One spot about 20 feet below the overhang works with small cams (yellow and orange TCUs, possibly backed up with a tricam or purple or green camalot), but then the rope is not long enough to give freedom of movement at the next belay ledge. 50 m

P5. Escape the overhang by climbing the easy dihedral to the left. Up to a big ledge below a huge gendarme. Natural anchor on a questionable flake or gear anchor with cams. 5.0 climbing with scarce pro. 60 m

P6. Continue straight up, on the right side of the gendarme. To the right of the gendarme is its little sister, a rock shaped like the prow of a ship. Between them is a chimney. Climb the chimney, which is a surprisingly easy 5.2 and easy to protect. Escaping the chimney and then getting into the gully to the summit is more difficult, but also easy to protect.

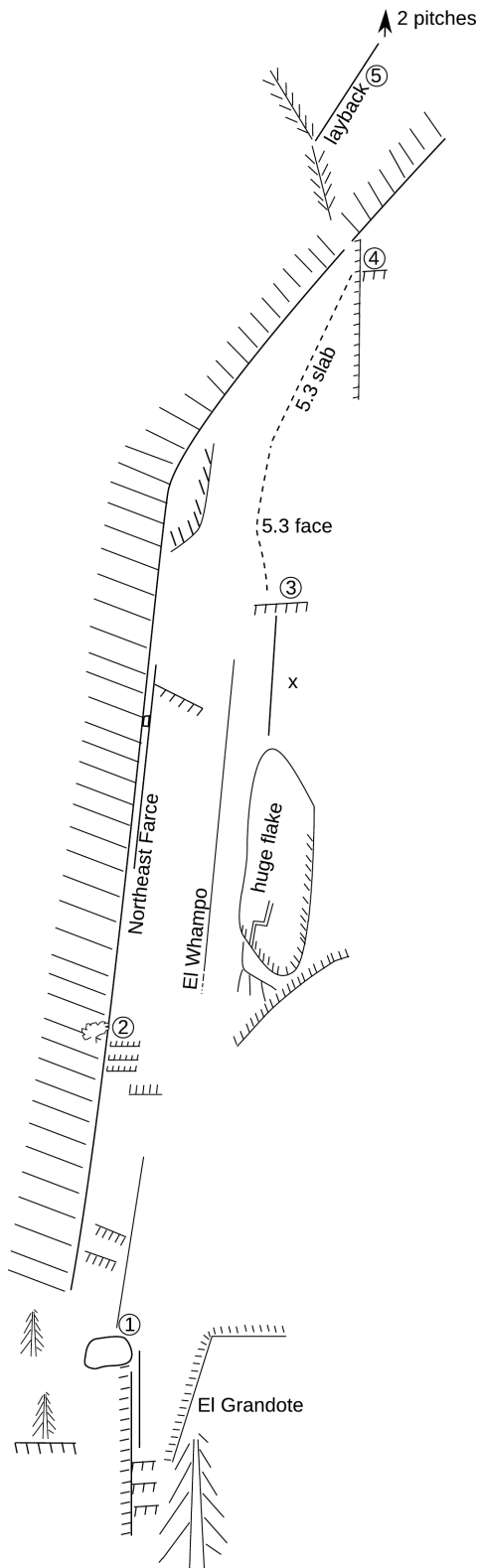
Var 1: It is also possible to go to the left of the gendarme. Rope drag may be a problem, and the crux move may be difficult to protect without depending on bad rock.

Gain the summit ridge and head down left into the north gully descent route, or insert into the gully more directly by scrambling.

Ben Crowell, github.com/bcrowell/tahquitz

El Whampo (5.7)

Warning: I have only done this route once.



The climb starts at the base of the huge right-facing Northeast Farce dihedral, at the extreme left side of the northeast face. This dihedral can be distinguished from the Northeast Rib dihedral to its left because the Northeast Farce dihedral is bigger, has a 6-foot-diameter tree near its base, and has the distinctive El Grandote overhang to its right. Pro to 3". FA Richard Coats, Larry Reynolds, D. McLean, and D. Ross, 1964.

P1. Head up an easy 5th class gully to the left of the El Grandote Arch. If you want to combine pitches 1 and 2, you will need to start at the second or third of the ledges in the gully. A headwall is formed by a bus-sized boulder. Pass around the boulder to the right, and belay on top of it.

P2. Climb a thin crack and then move left into the dihedral at one of two ledges. The first ledge is easier. Follow the dihedral to a belay at a small forked deciduous tree with rap rings. The tree is pretty small and should be backed up with gear if it is to be used as a belay anchor.

P3. Traverse right across slab to a point below a long crack that runs along the left side of a huge flake. A difficult move on steep slab is required in order to reach the crack, which lacks definition at the very bottom, but soon becomes deep and fist-width. As you continue up the crack, it thins to finger width. Exit right (another difficult move) to reach a belay ledge.

The following is some helpful beta from Mountainproject users on the cruxy traverse at the beginning of the pitch: Roger Linfield: "traverses right to a crux finger jam move" Camron: "There are two variations . . . You can traverse down low from the belay station to the crack where you can get one piece in before you reach the crack or you can climb 10 feet up and then make the traverse to the crack (no pro)." The Gray Tradster: "you can get reasonable protection for the upper variation by climbing up about 15 ft and placing gear under the flake as far right as you can get a good piece. Then down climb to the white streak and traverse. After reaching the main crack either do not place until well above the traverse piece or down climb and clean so your second isn't facing a bone crushing swing."

P4. Head up toward the roof. The easier climbing and better pro are found by veering a little to the left and climbing 5.3 face, where big holds are available on a series of flakes. As you near the roof, turn right and begin traversing along a slab that is made more secure by the availability of underclings. A comfy belay is available at a little nook inside a dihedral (the top of El Dorado?). 5.3.

Var 1: Head more directly toward the belay, across slabs. 5.7 PG.

P5. Escape up and left through a gap in the roof above the belay, with a spicy move that is easily protected. Continue up a gully, which forks into a gully on the left and a right-facing dihedral to the right. Layback the dihedral.

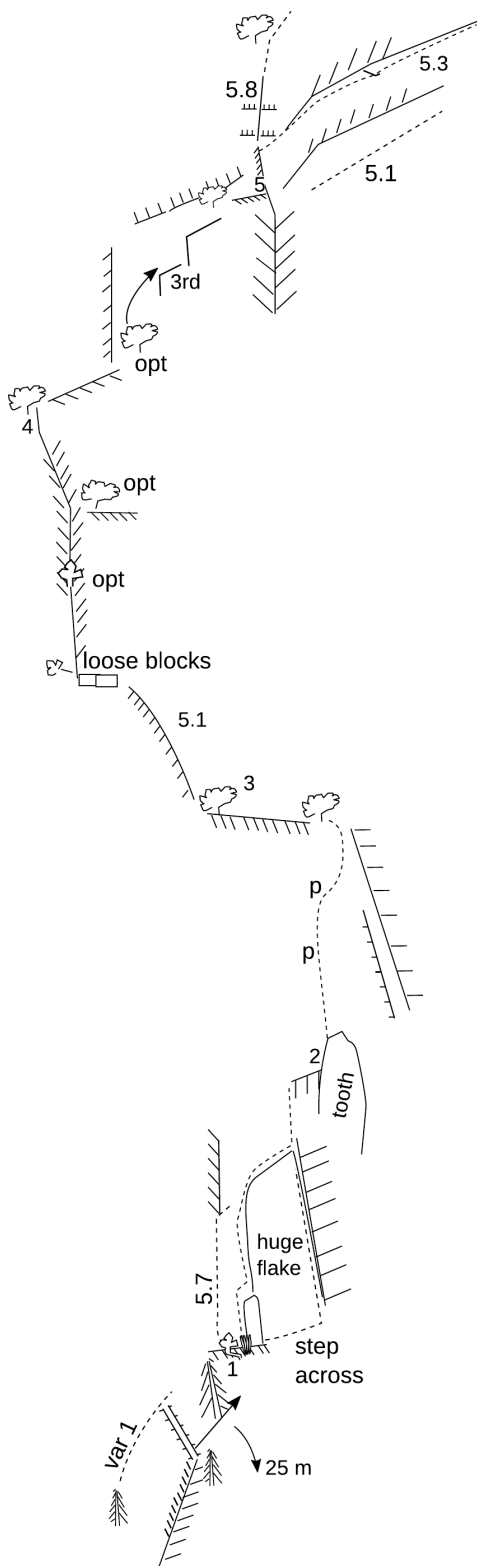
P6. Make your way across nondescript slab to a big, comfy belay at a short, squat pine tree.

P7. Two exits present themselves, and either will work. On the left is a fourth-class gully that leads to a short, exposed easy 5th class section to get around a corner. The exit on the right consists of class 4 ledges.

Descend via the northeast gully.

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White Maiden's Walkway (5.4)



Warning: I haven't done P1 var 1 or the 5.1 variation of P6.

A Tahquitz classic. Difficult routefinding. The route ends not far below the summit of Tahquitz and is one of the longer routes on the rock. Start from the left side of the Maiden Butress, which can be approached either from the North Side Trail or the Lunch Rock Trail. Pro to 3", or 4" for var 2 of P2. FA Jim Smith and Arthur Johnson, 1937.

P1. The obvious way up is a gully with pine trees in it. Scramble up class 4 rock to a belay at a dihedral. The first move is difficult; step left first using a hidden fingertip hold for balance, then mantle up into the crack. After the first pine tree, enter a gutter heading up and to the left, but then immediately exit the gutter to the right to avoid getting the rope snagged in brush. Continue past a big pine tree and belay at a small tree. 5.0 except for the initial 5.6 move.

Var 1: Start at a pine tree higher up to the left and climb the face. 5.4

P2. Traverse to the right, under branches and then over a saddle behind a boulder, and make an exposed step across into a gutter. This committing move can be protected with a #3 TCU. Head up the 5.0 gutter and watch for an exit to a large saddle on the right. A common mistake is to overshoot the saddle instead of exiting. 35 meters

Var 1: A clean straight-in hand and foot crack just left of the small tree. 5.7

Var 2: A ragged fist- and off-width crack heading straight up from brush to the right of the belay. A fall near the start risks impalement on a dead tree. 5.6

P3. From the center of the saddle, head straight up toward a small tree. Near the second fixed pin, you run out of easy ways up, the only apparent option being a very difficult mantling move up to a small sloper hold. Instead, grope for a series of excellent holds that allow you to easily move up and to the right. Come back to the tree. Place gear to route the rope so as to avoid damaging the tree by dragging the rope over it. Continue left across the ledge to a belay at another tree. 5.4, 35 meters

P4. Climb 15 meters up a flake. As the flake levels out and disappears, your left hand lands on a large, loose conch-shaped block, and there is a second block farther to the left. Walk across the two blocks and make a committing step around a corner to a stemming stance underneath a small tree. The stance can be stabilized with a hand in a finger-width crack on the right. Get on top of the tree and then head up a 5.0 gully. 60 m, easy 5th class except for the step around.

P5. Traverse right toward another tree, but head upward before it into a right-facing dihedral. Before getting too close to the ceiling, go back to traversing along 3rd-class ledges and flakes. Gear belay in a one-inch crack in a right-facing dihedral in the big gully. Class 3.

P6. For the standard 5.3 finish, head 10 feet up the gully, then exit into a cave formed by a claustrophobic overhang. Escape the cave by moving out onto a slab, approaching a wall that gets in the way. Move all the way out to the rightmost side of the wall. Get your right foot up on a small step-stool, side-pull on a hold, and mantle up.

Var 1: Head straight up through gaps in the overhangs above the belay. The crux is the awkward second gap, 5.8.

Either go down to the friction descent (p. 5) or go up and over the summit and come down the north gully.

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